



UNIT-1 What is Disabilities

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

Unit 1

What are Disabilities

Defining Terms

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines disabilities using terms that encompass three main ideas:

- **Impairment**, which is a difficulty with body function or structure
- **Limitation in activities**, where a person has difficulty doing something
- **Participation restrictions**, which describe having difficulty with a particular situation

Disability is a complex topic. It strongly reflects the society and culture in which we live, the places we work, and the functions that our bodies and minds can undertake.

The number of people with disabilities varies depending on the reports you read, although the WHO reports that worldwide, about 15% of the population has some kind of disability, and about 2 to 4% of the population has significant difficulties.

(Source: http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789240685215_eng.pdf)

As the world's population ages, the numbers appear to creep higher due to increased incidence of chronic disease, a population that is able to live longer due to medical technology, and more reporting. One important factor for workplaces is that reporting tends to focus on numbers, but the workplace perspective tends to look at function. We really want to consider what a person can or cannot do (functional abilities and restrictions), rather than knowing if a person has a disability that impacts their work, or what that condition is.

Test Your Knowledge

Can you think of some medical conditions that have practically little or no visible effect on work?

Finders

Find someone who looks as if they...	Person's Name
Enjoy writing	
Enjoy reading	
Like to play sports	
Are good with words	
Are an interesting conversationalist	
Are intelligent	
Write for a living	
Like crossword puzzles	
Don't enjoy reading	
Like driving fast cars	

Finders Debrief

Test Your Knowledge

What incorrect characteristics were attributed to you?

What correct characteristics were attributed to you?

What correct characteristics weren't attributed to you?

How did the exercise make you feel?

What does the exercise tell us about stereotypes?

About Stereotypes

One of the biggest barriers to diversity is our tendency to stereotype. Stereotypes can be so subtle that we don't even realize we're applying them.

The human mind thinks in categories, and we need these categories to help us organize all that we experience as we go through daily life. Without categories, our brains would be filled with a jumble of disconnected facts, impressions, sights, sounds, thoughts, ideas, and sensations. The categories help us make sense of the world we live in and give us a shorthand way to respond to people and events.

The categories in our minds contain not just facts and data; they also contain meaning and evaluation. Our categories are not neutral. We usually have feelings about categories. These feelings may be positive or negative. Mention of a category often triggers an instant reaction, almost a reflex.

For instance, how do you feel when the following words are mentioned to you?

- Americans: _____
- Women: _____
- Blondes or Brunettes: _____
- Athletes: _____
- Mercedes: _____
- Scientists: _____

As you can see, your reactions are rarely neutral. Most of us have judgments, opinions, and feelings about most categories of things. This is appropriate and normal.

While categories are not a problem in and of themselves, they become a problem when we cannot distinguish between the characteristics of a category and the characteristics of an individual item, or individual person, within that category. Put another way, the category turns into a stereotype when we can no longer see an individual tree, but only see the forest. When we assume that all trees within a forest are identical, and cannot see that each individual tree has some characteristics in common with the others, that is when our category turns into a stereotype.

A common defense is, "Stereotypes are sometimes true." Stereotypes, by their very definition, cannot always be true. For example, think of the stereotype that all African-American men are good at basketball. Some African-American men may be very good at this sport, but there are certainly African-American men out there who are not good at this sport. Therefore, for the man who is good at basketball, that is simply an attribute of his character, not proof that all African-American men are the same as he is.

Test Your Knowledge

We make the same kind of stereotypes when it comes to people with disabilities. Can you think of some examples?

Some Common Phrases and the Stereotypes Behind Them

There are many phrases that connote stereotypes and are derogatory. One that I often hear, although it is becoming less popular as people become more aware, is “That was a stupid thing to do. You must be retarded or something!” This reveals two stereotypes: that if someone makes a mistake, they are stupid; and that being stupid, they must have some form of mental disability (which used to be referred to as “retardation”). No thought is given to other possible factors: that someone made a mistake or failed to forecast the consequences accurately because they were rushed, fatigued, distracted, or all kinds of other reasons.

Test Your Knowledge

Why do we find it so natural to make quick judgments about some people, even when we know that we don't have enough information about them?

How can we tell that we have stereotyped ourselves (placed limits on our aspirations that are unnecessary and unrealistic)?

Can you recall any situations in which the potential contribution of someone was limited because they had been stereotyped?

If you see a group stereotyping one of its members, how can you make them aware of what they are doing and what negative effect it is having?

If you see that someone has underestimated their competence, how can you help them to get a more accurate and positive picture of themselves?

How can you detect that someone has been stereotyped? What are the indicators?

Misconceptions and Realities

Test Your Knowledge

1. Employees with disabilities will cost my sick leave and extended health benefit plans money.

2. People with disabilities are less likely to have accidents than other employees.

3. It is expensive to accommodate workers with disabilities.

4. Certain jobs are better suited to disabled people.

5. Employees with disabilities are not able to meet performance standards.

6. People with disabilities will have problems with transportation.

7. Disabled workers are a good influence within the workplace.

A Business Case

Case Study #1

Carter is a 30 year old accounting supervisor with a great reference from a colleague of yours. Carter is looking for a change and the opportunity to move up within a business setting. He does not feel he can move beyond supervisor where he is, partly because he has a severe speech impediment. Although he has excellent people skills, he feels that he will not be promoted. (Your friend admits that Carter is probably right, although he has also said that after you get to know Carter it easier to understand him.)

You can really use some help in your business office, which is drowning in work but already has six staff and a capable manager in place. You are not sure if you can bring someone in the office who is in a wheelchair and is hard to understand. As well, there would probably need to be some rearranging of the office set up to accommodate a wheelchair. You might need a ramp in the parking lot too, and a better door to the bathroom. You do know that hiring someone is justified, and the current manager plans to

retire in three or four years, so there should be some potential for the existing staff to complete for that job.

Carter finished school with a diploma in accounting, and has since completed a supervisor’s certificate. You were impressed with him when you met. You have not advertised the job, but the workplace is not unionized and people are not going to gripe if you do not advertise it.

Test Your Knowledge

What should you do? How can you make this work for you, the company, and Carter?

Summary

Labor shortages mean that businesses will have to get creative to find great people to hire. Candidates are not going to be knocking on your door: you need to find them. In order to find people, you need to learn where they are, who they are, and what strengths they bring to your work. People with disabilities are educated, valuable, and can bring you a perspective that is different than people without disabilities. Tap into their strengths. Hiring people with disabilities makes sense and will help support the growth and success of your business.

Dissecting Labels

Giving Your Words Some Thought

Although we categorize people in our minds in order to organize information, we’ve also spoken with many disabled people who tell us how labels become offensive, embarrassing, and serve no purpose except to stereotype and even discriminate. These days we make efforts to celebrate differences and our uniqueness.

It’s sometimes hard to know what will offend people and what will be acceptable. For example, paper on an easel is commonly referred to in training classrooms as a “flip chart.” This can be an insult to a resident of the Philippines, where “flip” is a derogatory term for Filipino.

Some words are easier to figure out than others. Some are pretty obvious, and others are more subtle. Two examples:

- **Dumb:** Meaning that someone lacks intelligence or is unable to speak. This is derogatory to people with speech or developmental disabilities.
- **Stupid:** Meaning that someone lacks intelligence, is dull, or is foolish. This can be insulting to someone with developmental or learning disabilities.

Instead Of...	Try...
Handicapped	People with disabilities; people with special needs
Retarded	Developmentally challenged
Gifted children	Advanced learners
Uneducated	Lacking a formal education
Old people	Seniors; the elderly
Bitchy	Assertive
Spaz	Spasticity; uncontrolled limbs

(From *The Diversity Advantage* by Lenora Billings-Harris)

We do admit that in the attempt to be politically correct, things have gone a bit too far. A replacement word is of little use if no one knows what the new word means! Can you figure out what these terms are supposed to mean?

Word	Meaning
Incomplete success	Failure
Possessing an alternative body image	Overweight
Sobriety deprived	Alcoholic
Processed tree carcasses	Wood
Cerebrally challenged	Unintelligent
Motivationally dispossessed	Lazy

(From *The Diversity Advantage* by Lenora Billings-Harris)

It's also not productive if you are constantly worrying about what you say. Instead, let's go over a few ground rules that will ensure your speaking is politically correct.

Don't make fun.

Even if you're making a joke about a person's height or weight, it's probably not funny. Usually, these remarks hit a sensitive area in the person they are directed toward. Even if a person pokes fun about their own abilities, their wheelchairs, or a shortcoming, that doesn't mean it's acceptable for you to do so. If you think about most popular comedians, they are funny because they make fun of themselves, not someone else.

Ask what a person prefers.

If you're not sure what terms are acceptable, ask the person. This can save you time and heartache.

Don't include descriptive traits in a person's description unless necessary.

Let's say you're telling a story about your CEO and you describe her as having an artificial limb, or that she has Multiple Sclerosis or cerebral palsy. Ask yourself why those labels are necessary.

Apologize if you goof up.

No one is perfect. If you goof up, apologize sincerely, and then drop it.

Being Practical

When it comes to the workplace, there are several descriptors that are helpful when it comes to making decisions about accommodation. When an employer is making some adaptations to accommodate someone, they normally ask for (and receive) information from the employee's physician, physiotherapist, psychologist, and/or occupational therapist. This information will outline whether limitations and restrictions for the particular job are permanent or temporary (and if so, how long they are expected to last at this level).

Depending on the type of work it can also be important to determine whether the condition itself and limitations or restrictions are mild, moderate, or severe.

For example, if a candidate being considered for a job has epilepsy, there can be a range of considerations for the employer. Let's say the candidate works in an office setting, has a seizure of moderate severity about once every six months, and has mild seizures once per month. The employer will determine whether the office can be made safe for the individual and whether staff working with the individual should have first aid training in the event of a seizure.

On the other hand, let's say the candidate is being considered for a manufacturing plant job where there is large heavy equipment and moving machinery and the job is as a shipping/receiving supervisor. Medication is controlling seizures and there have been no severe seizures in more than two years. There may be no need to make accommodations at all, although staff may be trained to recognize signs of a

seizure, and in first aid. (Since this type of work usually requires that most or all staff are trained in first aid, this may not even be an extra step for the employer to take.)

If an employee never asks for an accommodation (because their disability is not noticeable or because they choose not to ask), the employer may not be under obligation to make any kind of accommodation. It's important that if the employee wants something, they ask. It's equally important that if the employer is asked, they respond appropriately.

Mingle with Me

People of all types and abilities want to be included. If you remember being in junior high or high school, you may recall seeing how hard it was for some students to be included, or you may have had trouble with it yourself. As adults, this situation doesn't really change unless a workplace makes a commitment to be welcoming and inclusive.

If you take new people out to lunch during their first week on the new job, do it with everyone, whether they are disabled or not. If you have a social gathering, invite everyone. (Just make sure to choose an accessible location.) If you've gotten into the habit of storing materials on ramps, in wide doorways, or in accessible washroom stalls, get them out of there without making your disabled staff feel like they are putting you out or as if you are doing them a favor.

Develop relationships.

Be friendly and welcoming to people. Just because someone is disabled does not mean they are looking for special treatment. Everyone wants to be accepted. Inclusion means that we include people, consider their needs, and treat them with courtesy.

Ask, instead of always offering help.

Sometimes we automatically leap to help people, despite the fact that they do not want our help. If you see someone in a wheelchair reaching for something that is on a high shelf, do not automatically reach for it. Ask them if you can help them.

People with disabilities are people, not the equipment that serves them.

Do not talk down to people who are seated in a wheelchair. Grab a chair and sit level with them. Don't push or touch their wheelchair without asking them. Don't use their wheelchair as a perch for your coat or supplies.

Be clear in your communication, including your instructions.

People with developmental disabilities and some learning disabilities may not be able to follow complex, multi-step directions. This can happen to non-disabled people too! Make sure your instructions are in easy-to-follow chunks. Sometimes having them in writing is best (like a recipe); other times you simply need to break things down.

Aim to please.

Most of us look for acceptance, and some of us want to please. This can create challenges in the workplace, so it's important that you understand your staff, their abilities, and their limitations. For people with developmental disabilities, routine work and familiarity will help them succeed. A change in work responsibilities or the environment may require a period of adjustment and understanding as they adjust.

Treat service animals with respect.

Service animals work for their owner. They are specially trained to respond to very specific needs. Guide dogs can be trained to guide the blind, act as hearing assistance for the hearing impaired, and work as service animals for people with conditions such as brain injuries, seizures, and much more.

You should never, ever touch a service animal, or the person they support, without permission. The animal will be very committed to doing their job. Any distraction that you create can disrupt their concentration, upset that routine, and prevent them from serving the person they support.

Use sensitive language.

Insensitive Term	Sensitive Term
Handicap	
The handicapped	
Crippled with	
Deaf and dumb	
Birth defects	
Wheelchair bound	